Inspire • Support • Uphold

HOLA helps Hispanic community through collaboration

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Telegram photos by Lad Strayer

Martha Ramirez from Arandas Jalisco, Mexico, speaks with Charlie Ojeda at his Dos Hermanos market on Beecher Street. Ojeda is a founding member of Hispanics of Lenawee Alliance, which is helping Ramirez's family open a Mexican restaurant in Adrian.

ADRIAN — Part humanitarian organization and part chamber of commerce, a local Hispanic organization is working to create unity and promote Latin culture throughout Lenawee County.

Called HOLA (Hispanics of Lenawee Alliance), the association of 30 local business owners and leaders is still defining itself but is committed to a simple mission of using collaborative efforts to inspire, support and uphold the Hispanic community, its members say.

To date, the group has worked on projects ranging from aid for displaced Hurricane Katrina victims to hosting a grand opening celebration for two new Hispanic-owned businesses.

HOLA Chairman Ben Negron, Adrian Meijer store director, describes the organization as a group of local Hispanic business owners, business leaders, clergy and professionals who are interested in fortifying the local Hispanic culture.

The group began with Dos Hermanos market owner Charlie Ojeda and a group of colleagues who hatched a plan to celebrate the annual arrival of Hispanic migrant farm workers.

"We would not have successful businesses without the migrant support," Ojeda said, so a small group went about creating the first local celebration of the workers' arrival in Adrian in 15 years. The event was a resounding success, Ojeda said, and from it grew a greater desire for individual community members to pool their talents and knowledge to advance Lenawee County's Hispanic community.

The group grew quickly from about 12 people to 30 as Ojeda and others recruited new members to the not-yet-named organization.

"From those 30, we decided we could have a big impact by assisting and helping and making life better for others," Ojeda said.

Negron, whose mother is Mexican and his father, a local pastor, is Puerto Rican, was one of the local Hispanics who jumped at the chance to serve the local Latin community.

"My father being a pastor, I've seen many times when he would have to give of himself to help the Hispanic community, and over the years, I wanted to do something similar," Negron said. "I found this could be a good way for me to practice some of what I learned as a child."

He describes HOLA as a Hispanic network capable of matching people with needs to others who can help. Negron said the organization isn't focused on filling any single community need, but wants to establish a network to meet any needs that might arise.

Ben Negron, president of HOLA, raises his arm in celebration as Ruben and Angelica Ibarra cut the ribbon in front of their new business, Ibarra's Auto Repair, in December.

"These are community members who have been here a long time and know who and how to help in certain situations. What we want is to leverage their networks to meet the needs we identify," he said.

Ojeda said individuals have attempted similar efforts in the past, but an organized, group approach sets HOLA apart.

"There have been friends to the Hispanic community who have contributed quite a lot individually, and we want to see what we can do as a whole," he explained.

The group meets once a month at the

Please see **HOLA**, page **A4**

HOLA projects

■ Organized an Adrian Migrant Welcome Fiesta in June to welcome Hispanic agricultural workers to the community. The event drew more than 600 people — a crowd so large that it caused traffic problems in the area, resulting in police intervention. The event served as HOLA's introduction to the community, chairman Ben Negron said.

■ Partnered with local businesses to donate more than 25 backpacks filled with school supplies to children of families who moved to Adrian in the fall after being displaced from their Gulf Coast homes by Hurricane Katrina. The families also received $500 in groceries.

■ Attended the Adrian Meijer remodel grand opening in November in support of a new international foods section the store added that includes a variety of Hispanic foods.

■ Donated food and supported a joint grand opening celebration in December for two new Hispanic-owned business on Adrian's east side. The celebration in honor of Ibarra's Auto Repair and Little Leslie gift shop, 123 and 124 Tecumseh St., was attended by HOLA members and city and county officials.

■ Partnered with local businesses to donate groceries to needy migrant families throughout the year. Ana Rivera, HOLA board member and community resource specialist for the Community Action Agency of Lenawee County, coordinated the donation.

■ HOLA leaders are working with city leaders to form a committee in support of creating a cultural center in Adrian. HOLA is one partner in the planning process for the initiative.